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NICARAQUA
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The Nicaraguan army deployed tanks and armored vehicles throughout the capital Monday following a warning by President Daniel Ortega that the United States could attack Nicaragua in the next few days.

'Because of the present danger of an eventual American invasion, the government is taking and will take in the next few days a series of measures to prepare the nation to overcome the invasion,' Ortega was quoted as saying in Monday's editions of the official newspaper Barricada.

Observers touring Managua, where 800,000 of the nation's 3 million citizens live -- counted 70 tanks and armored vehicles, most camouflaged with branches and each manned by a handful of soldiers.

The mobilization of tanks appeared slightly less extensive than one that took place last November when unnamed CIA sources said Nicaragua had received Soviet MiG fighter jets, a story that later proved false.

The event, known as the 'MiG crisis,' prompted Ortega to put the army on full alert and mobilize reserves. After it was proven the planes were never delivered, the crisis subsided.

In a one-sentence statement issued Monday afternoon, the Ministry of Defense said 'because of the latest events that threaten the security of the Nicaraguan people, the Sandinista People's Army is taking the corresponding steps to guarantee national integrity and security.'

Asked to explain the statement, an army spokesman said, 'based on the declarations of President Ortega that it is necessary to prepare for the defense.'

'It is a defensive movement,' said a soldier guarding an armored personnel carrier across the street from Government House in downtown Managua.

Ortega and other government leaders this week accused Reagan of using 'international tensions' created by the Beirut hostage crisis and the killing of four Marines in El Salvador as a 'pretext' to take military action against Nicaragua.

Ortega has made three public appearances in the past week where he has warned of the possibility of an imminent United States intervention in Nicaragua.

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In the past, officials said the mobilization permits the army to disperse armored vehicles and avoid having them destroyed in a surgical bombing attack by the United States.

Reagan has accused Nicaragua of harboring the headquarters of the political and military leadership of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement, which claimed responsibility for killing the Marines.

Ortega earlier accused the United States of acting ''like the world's foremost terrorist'' by supporting rebels seeking the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government.

In remarks Sunday to a group of Nicaraguan Indians, Ortega charged the United States has continually tried to topple the leftist Nicaraguan government since it took power in 1979 after ousting dictator Anastasio Somoza.

''The American government conducts itself like the world's foremost terrorist with a president that took power as the carrier of death for all Nicaraguans,'' said Ortega, referring to Reagan in remarks broadcast Monday by state Radio Voice of Nicaragua.